

2006-1-22  
Mark Belletini

## Healing our Hurt

### Opening Words

We are here  
*after a week of roller-coaster weather,*  
cold and balmy, still and windy  
*to worship, to sift the precious*  
from the presumptuous,  
*and to the rekindle our hopes and dreams*  
in a demanding world. And so we say

**Mindful of the responsibility our freedom presses into us, blest by the beauty of the world, and drawn by a vision of a community known for its honesty, generosity, depth, love, and justice-work, we focus our time together by the kindling of light.**

### Sequence

So here's a question I ask on the brink of silence:  
What makes this day any different from any other day?  
Is it the never-before seen shade of cloud  
shining through the skylight above me right now?  
Is it the Mozart dance, never-before heard by me, which I enjoyed on the way to this house of  
life, still echoing within me?  
Is it the crowd of memories  
that flooded into me this morning  
after I talked with my ailing mother?  
Is it the way my body aches just so after a packed Saturday and the long crafting of these words I  
am saying right now?  
Is it the left-over tears still wetting the corner of my eyes since I watched that South African film  
earlier this week?  
Why is this day different from any other day?  
It's not. Like every other day I ever lived,  
a Tuesday in August when I was eight,  
a Monday in June when I was 27,  
a Thursday in February when I was 52,  
today is still today. Plain and simple. Perfectly,  
flawlessly now.  
Not yesterday's faces nor tomorrow's headlines.  
Just now. Precisely now.  
Nothing more than this focused moment  
on a Sunday in January 2006.  
And so, with the oil of our exquisite silence,  
I bid us all anoint this moment  
and set it apart, thankfully unique,  
yet exactly the same as any other now.

*silence*

And yet, recognizing that even the most  
simple moment is crowded,  
and that all other days, equally unique,  
equally hopeful, press in on this moment  
let us release our love for those who  
dance forever in our hearts, those whom  
we love, or who love us or even challenge us:  
I bid us name them, aloud or in silent peace.

*naming*

So here's a question.  
What music is more beautiful  
than the music that sounds right now?  
What body, O Love, is more  
tender than the true body of this music  
which embraces us right now?

### **Readings**

***The First Reading** comes from the book *The Feeling Buddha* by David Brazier, 2001.*

We all carry hurt within us. It is not possible to have gone through life without getting buffeted. The hurt we carry is fuel. And fuel is one of the essential conditions for a fire. When a person or a whole community, is spiritually impoverished, this fuel is stored up. It then becomes tinder dry. The potential for fire to get out of control is then great. This is when wars start.

I asked an acquaintance from Sarajevo why he thought the civil war there broke out. He said "Boredom." He meant that people's lives had ceased to be purposeful, and that war gave them a sense of direction. People sometimes fear that religion causes wars, but although religion, patriotism, self-interest, history and many other things may be invoked by war-mongers, the real root of war is spiritual bankruptcy.

We are all carrying a lot of fuel. Fires can break out at any time. The client who comes to therapy typically says something like "I have such and such distress, but I do not know why." Sometimes, after hearing just a little about what the person has been through or is currently enduring, one feels there is nothing pathological about their pain at all: it is simply the natural response to their situation. But if a person believes they should never *have* such feelings, they are likely to blame themselves, or others. Wars, both internal and external, grow out of blame, and blame grows out of non-acceptance.

***The Second Reading** is a parable crafted by Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun who chairs the Global Peace Initiative of Women which is affiliated with the United Nations.*

"Where should I look for enlightenment?" the disciple asked.

"Here," the elder said.

"When will it happen?" the disciple asked.

"It is happening right now," the elder answered.

"Then why don't I experience it?" the disciple persisted. "Because you do not look," the elder said.

“But what should I look for?” the disciple continued.  
“Nothing. Just look,” the elder said.  
“But at what?” the disciple asked again.  
“At anything your eyes light upon,” the elder answered.  
“But must I look in a special kind of way?” the disciple went on.  
“No, the ordinary way will do,” the elder said.  
“But don’t I always look the ordinary way?” the disciple said.  
“No you don’t,” the elder said.  
“But why ever not?” the disciple asked.  
“Because to look, you must be here. You’re mostly somewhere else,” the elder said.

## **Sermon**

It’s interesting how certain images can help you feel... at home. Take the image of a windmill.

When I was in eighth grade, I remember the nun talking about geography every Wednesday afternoon. All the countries, their capitals and resources paraded before us, via picture books and posters hung on the wall.

And the poster labeled Holland featured a huge windmill rising up out of a wonderful striped field of tulips.

I loved that poster. And I decided that I like Holland too. The nun talked about the Zuider Zee (now there’s a fun word for an eighth grader to toss about!) and about the remarkable land reclamation habits of the Dutch made possible by their well-engineered dikes. She talked about the famous tulip farms, she made us giggle by talking about the clip-clop of wooden shoes, and she mentioned that Holland was simply thick with these great windmills.

She never told us what a windmill was, however. I knew what *wind* meant; of course, but what would someone who thought flour came in paper bags from Kroger’s know about a mill?

But even if I was not quite sure what a windmill was, the majestic image of it *was* Holland for me.

When I got older, I found out what windmills did, sure enough. But I also found out that much of what I had been taught was, in all charity, the simplified version.

For instance, I discovered that there *is* no such country as Holland. There is a nation called Nederland, or The Netherlands in English, and I learned that one of its northern districts is called North Holland, and the district just west and south of the principle city, Amsterdam, is called South Holland. But there is no “Holland” per se.

And when I went to Amsterdam for the first time, all of the symbolic images from my geography class were simply not there. No blonds clacking around in wooden shoes, no “Hans Brinker and the silver skates,” and no windmills anywhere. I saw as many people of African descent as I would see in any Great Lakes city here in the States, and I saw as many people of Asian descent as you might find in any West Coast city in the States. Nowhere did I see cute bonnets or frilly Dutch lace. Nowhere did I find Holland.

Until I went to visit my friend Hans. Hans drove me from Amsterdam out to his house in Hilversum, and there at last I saw a sign that said “Holland” (albeit *North* Holland,) the district where Hilversum is. And there at last I saw windmills. Lots of them. Their sails slowly spinning in the silver morning mist. And all of a sudden, the familiarity of the image of the windmill made me feel right at home. Everything I had been told wasn’t entirely wrong.

Now what has this image of a windmill to do with the idea of healing from hurt?

Good question. I will answer the question, of course, but I will get to it in my usual roundabout way.

First, I want to talk about hurt. Our Buddhist author, David Brazier, asserts quite plainly:

“We all carry hurt within us. It is not possible to have gone through life without getting buffeted.”

No question. Buddhist teachers like Mr. Brazier are very good, often, at pointing this out. But Brazier, later in his book, corrects the common misconception that Siddhartha, the Buddha, *only* preached a gospel of universal suffering. He also preached about happiness, and knew that most of us know that experience as well. And although he taught us that some suffering must simply be borne, he also taught us that it’s most often possible to heal from our hurt too. In fact, his famous parable about the arrow makes this clear as glass: if you are walking along and an arrow suddenly zips right into your leg, don’t go around asking “Gosh, who shot the arrow?” Or “I wonder if the archer was tall or short? Or “Gee, how could such a painful accident have even happened in this sunny world?” No, just take the fool arrow out, say “OW,” that really hurts!” and then dress the wound. Ask those questions later if you really must, but please, not before you attend to the hurt.

So what causes hurt? Well besides arrows, and other physical pains, (which are really not really what I am talking about here)....change. Change often leads to hurt.

Any change that does not make us happy.

Such as the end of a friendship.

Such as the crumbling of an expectation.

Such as the loss of a dream, a hope, a job,  
a spouse, an imagined future.

Such as betrayal. Or being belittled.

Such as being placed in a category and dismissed because of that.

Such as not being loved well, (or at all by any ordinary measurements of love,) by a clumsy parent.

Such as the distorting social horrors of battlefield experiences, or the Great Depression, or terrible poverty, or a horrible sexual overpowering.

Such as being judged, willy-nilly, by others.

Such as wanting to be loved by someone  
in a certain way, but not experiencing that love.

You and I could obviously make a much longer list, each of the personal, each of them painful.

Of course, I have to say this...there are hurts... and then there are hurts.

Take relationships of the romantic kind, for example. If you wish someone you like a lot to call you, and they do not, and you simply wait for them to call, expecting them to do so when they never really promised you that they would call in the first place, you are feeling the undeniable hurt of lovesickness. (Limerance is the fancy word.) But lovesickness is hurt that could have been avoided in the first place by not having so many unrealistic romantic expectations to begin with. However, if this person promised to call you, and didn't, well don't just sit there feeling sorry for yourself, call them on it. But do get clear on the source of your expectations.

So, the first way to begin to deal with hurts in our lives is to sift them through our thoughtful fingers. We have to separate the real deep hurts from the mere stings. Are some of them, like that love-sickness, only hurts that come from unrealistic expectations that are never met? If so, best adjust our expectations more realistically.

Besides, paring down expectations always strikes me as a good and useful spiritual exercise anyway. For each and every day.

But a lot of hurt is far deeper than that.

And it often occupies our inner life for years, for decades. Our Buddhist thinker, Mr. Brazier, even goes so far as to suggest that war itself may stem from buried, real, terrible and hurt which has never been faced or even felt without denial.

I think he has a good point, and I personally would like to see more study in that area. I've always suspected as much, personally.

But surely, his point is not that the hurt never happened, *but that it has never been faced*. Never admitted. Never accepted as really having happened. And so all those jagged feelings are tapped down, denied; the event may even be suppressed, forgotten, and live on only as a brooding rage, quick temper, deep depression or overweening resentment at all levels of one's life. Brazier puts this plainly: "*But if a person believes they should never have such feelings, they are likely to blame themselves, or others. Wars, both internal and external, grow out of blame, and blame grows out of non-acceptance.*"

So the second step to healing hurt, once we have sifted deeper hurts from more cosmetic hurts, is to say OW. To accept that we hurt and to then feel the hurt. To cry out. To be angry. To hit one's fist against one's palm. To shout "I feel betrayed." To cry "O my God, this hurts!." And maybe it's important to stop using the word "shouldn't" once and for all in our lives. I'm telling you now, it's always in someone *else's* interest that you *shouldn't* admit *your* pain. But someone else is not living your life... you are. So whether they think you should or shouldn't feel your hurt. Feel it.

But healing is still to come.

The next thing to do is to recite the Joan Chittister's parable over and over again until its memorized, and becomes one with your breath. Enlightenment, that is, happiness, she says, is not going to come if you don't open your eyes. And if you are not living right now, which is where happiness lives, but in the past, where happiness isn't, and hurt is, how could you ever expect to be happy in the first place?

Of course, real hurts in the past *do* affect our whole lives. Absolutely. Hurt distorts them like the images in a funhouse mirror. And, worse, it affects me even more when I discover that I myself

have hurt someone else. Having to live with my own lack of consciousness in the past creates a deep hurt too.

But the past really happened. I didn't imagine it, like I can imagine the future. The pain really happened. Yes it did.

But Joan Chittister reminds me that it is not happening any more. And to be present to my life, my pursuit of happiness, I have to live here and now. I have to be present.

Since the past cannot be undone, how do I let it not affect me so much?

By re-contextualizing it. By re-casting it. By recognizing that even if you cannot make it go away, you do have the power to see what you can learn from it. Not that I believe that the reason we suffer is to learn lessons...that is not my theology, personally.

But I do think that it's possible to step back a bit, up here in the present, and to set the hurt into a larger context, i.e. what might it have been in the life of the person who hurt you to become so hurtful? Or, you could sit down and make a list of the things you could do which would allow you to cope with the memories of the hurt more effectively. You could also name whatever fears are keeping you from moving forward. That might give you a few insights. And, you might ask yourself if there are comforts found in the hurt, so that you find your life more passionate and angry and energized by tightly holding on to past hurts so you can nurture a resentment that makes you feel righteous. Not everyone, you see, wants to give up their hurt. Sometimes they feed on them.

One can also, step by step, slowly, and deliberately, use the past event something like a diving board: to spur positive motion instead of retrograde motion. Fired? Mourn, get angry, then consult a career counselor to help you begin to re-imagine, or even re-invent your professional life. Discover other options, uncover opportunities you discarded long ago. And after a break up, why not stress friendship over romantic love? Why not refuse to see romantic love as the major definition of happiness. In fact, spend time each day redefining happiness, so that it is not something that ends up defining you.... as unhappy.

All of these re-castings make for good spiritual work, which restores our energy for life and love and returns us to our more lively selves.

Which, perhaps surprisingly, brings me back to the image of those lively windmills over there in Holland, or Nederland. This image was explored beautifully by Rick Foster and Greg Hicks in their most insightful book, "How We Choose to Be Happy." (A Perigee Book, 1999) That's right, happy. You may have noticed by now that I have been using the word *happiness* as the precise contrast to the word *hurt*.

So when I learned what windmills are, I learned they are machines. They have a purpose, a drive, gears that grind and produce nourishing flour from stubborn hard grain. And the source of their power to do that work is the wind, blowing through their sails.

But the wind is change itself, isn't it? It gusts; it changes direction; it's a gentle breeze one minute, and a destructive storm the next. But it's always moving, always changing. "The winds of change blow continuously through our lives" the authors write.

We are windmills. Our purpose, our life is to catch that wind in our sails to convert the gusty changes that blow through us into energy and power. And if we are in poor condition, letting past hurts, and fears of future hurts, keep our machinery rigid and rusted, and our sails tattered, we will not be able to make anything useful out of the storms that rampage through our lives. The strong winds may even slit our sails, and permanently strip our gears.

But if we are in good repair, the wind, no matter how it blows, will lead to healthy power. And how do we keep ourselves in good repair as human windmills? By 1., the spiritual work of sifting through our lives to separate deep hurts from surface annoyance, 2., to experience the hurt and not deny it; 3., to focus on living in the present, not the past or future, and 4., to begin to recast ancient hurts into larger, more humane and less personal contexts. Such work is the oil that greases the gears. Such work is the miller's sure hand tightening the sails to proper tension, and keeping the whole thing in good repair. And with such a finely tuned windmill, even the stormiest of winds can be converted into power for growth and nurture.

Buddha was right you know. The winds will always blow. Sometimes really rough. No one is exempted. But happiness is also a real power, Buddha preached. So healing from hurt is important. Pull the arrows out. Yes, doing that hurts all the more, sometimes, and it often feels as if the aching scars the arrows leave could define us once and for all. But fear is not reality. It's possible, I say, to so keep your spiritual machinery in such good repair as to make the negative work of our hurt futile in the end.

Now maybe the spiritual image of a machine like a windmill doesn't float your boat. Maybe the wheels and gears seem too mechanical for you, and you need something a bit more fluid. Well, Brazier uses the image of fuel and fire, that might be better for you. And there are many other images as well which could pave your path toward healing. Use what images work best for you. But I assure you, you do not have to live with perpetual hurt in your heart.

Because, as I said at the beginning of this sermon, as I begin to speak of Holland's geography "it is interesting how certain images can help you feel at home." Home in yourself. Home in your life. "Take the image of a windmill, for example."

## **Offering**

### **Gloria**

Glory on high. Glory below.  
Glory within. Glory bestow.  
Glory in light. Glory in dark.  
Glory in sun. Glory in spark.  
Glory in wounds. Glory in tears.  
Glory in love. Glory for years.